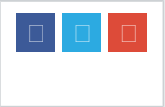




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Cleaning up cancer concerns in San Jacinto River hits snag

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HIGHLANDS, Texas (FOX 26) - One [organization](#)  has been fighting for years against toxic waste pits

block. The residents who want these former Dioxin dumps removed were ecstatic when the

Environmental Protection Agency recently announced plans for a complete cleanup. Then the group learned of a letter sent to the EPA supposedly on its behalf requesting to put the brakes on the process.

"Our coalition and our community has worked for many years to push this process forward," explains San Jacinto River Coalition leader Jackie [Young](#). But now the push to pull the pits of Dioxin from the San Jacinto River has stalled.

"I'm honestly repulsed by Mr. Knickerbocker's fraudulent request to stall this process," adds Young. "All of the scientific data is showing very toxic contaminants in the ground water."



Cleaning up cancer concerns in San Jacinto River hits snag

Who is Mr. Knickerbocker? According to a letter to the EPA asking for more time for public comment, Thomas Knickerbocker is the attorney for the San Jacinto River Coalition. That's the group of residents, current and former, fighting to remove the potentially cancer-causing chemical Dioxin dumped there more than 50 years ago. It's now deserted and left embedded in the banks of the river.

However, the San Jacinto River Coalition says Attorney Knickerbocker does not represent the group.

"Mr. Knickerbocker's deceptive letter appears to be submitted for the purpose of creating confusion," says Young.

"It's inappropriate behavior at best," says resident and San Jacinto River Coalition member Albert Leal. "Calling it for what it is, it's fraud."

"The residents our coalition represents view the request for an extension as a grave disregard for public health and the environment," says Young. "Those who have hired Mr. Knickerbocker have never publicly come forward. At the Oct. 20, 2016 EPA waste hearing, the only people who spoke out on behalf of (the group) "Keep It Capped" were paid lobbyists."

"I think it comes down to dollars and cents," says Pam Bonta, a former Highlands resident and member of the San Jacinto River Coalition. "It doesn't come down to human life."

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The group wants the pollution pits removed. The members believe, and say that testing proves, the chemical has seeped into the soil and water supply.

"My husband's been affected," adds Bonta. "He has Multiple Myeloma cancer. My animals are dying and have died. Most of my neighbors have already died."

"We still go fishing, but we can't eat the fish," says resident and San Jacinto River Coalition member Richard Johnson. "We see people down there every fish they catch, every crab they catch goes in that bucket and they eat it."

"It's a beautiful thing when the best available science that the EPA has been looking at for many years is completely consistent with common sense," says Melanie Scruggs with the Texas Campaign for the Environment. "A hazardous waste site does not belong in a river."

The EPA has extended the public comment period but this group is asking for the clean-up process to continue.

Attorney Thomas Knickerbocker says he represents San Jacinto Citizens Against Pollution, a group who wants the pits capped instead of removed. Knickerbocker says the San Jacinto River Coalition's name ending up on the letter to the EPA was simply a typographical error.



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